

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:05 p.m. in the Knapp Center at Drake University. In his re-

marks, he referred to Michael R. Ferrari, president of the university, and Mayor A. Arthur Davis of Des Moines.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Tobacco Use Prevention and an Exchange With Reporters February 12, 1996

[Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala thanked the President for his leadership on the issue of tobacco and children and described the participants in the discussion.]

The President. I'm looking forward to it. First of all, let me welcome all of you here to the White House and to the Oval Office.

As I'm sure you know, this is an issue that has concerned me for some time, and there are real reasons for it. Three thousand young people start smoking every day, even though it's illegal for them to do so. A thousand will have their lives shortened because of it. Smoking tobacco is the largest single cause of preventable death in the United States every year. And while there are things the Government can do about it, we need your help.

When I gave my State of the Union Address I said that our country has seven great challenges for the future, but the first and most important is to strengthen our families and give all of our children back their childhood. In the case of teen smoking, the Food and Drug Administration is reviewing about 700,000 comments from citizens before deciding what to do to discourage the marketing, the advertising, the sales of cigarettes to children more. We just promulgated what it called the Synar regulation, named in honor of the late Congressman from Oklahoma, Mike Synar, which requires States to take stronger stands to discourage teen smoking and to set a goal of reducing teen smoking by about 80 percent over the next several years.

So we're working hard, but we know we've got to have your help. We know this has got to be a partnership. I think the most important thing I've learned as President is that while Government can't solve all of our problems, we have no business going back to a time when everybody's left to fend for themselves. These are things we have to do together. And I want

to compliment the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and, of course, the National PTA—thank you so much—and the American Cancer Society and all of those who are going to create this National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids. This center is sort of a symbol of how I think America ought to work, because it will involve the best national experts but, more importantly, community groups, all kinds of grassroots groups of people working together to try to deal with this issue.

And I just want to thank you and say that I hope that your presence here today and your work and your concern, especially the young people, will be a symbol that will, through the help of all these fine people here covering us, go out across America so that others will do that.

I mean, the ultimate issue here is to protect our children more and to give more control of family life back to parents. I don't think many parents want their children to start smoking. And parents, not advertising, should control that. Children should have a chance to learn within the family unit, within the school, within the churches, within the community, without being bombarded by all kinds of destructive messages that will knock them off track. So ultimately, this is an effort that will give some dimension of real control and values back to the family, which is what we want to do.

Well, I'd like to spend the rest of the time listening to you. We could start—Donna, how should we do it?

[Secretary Shalala introduced several teens who had done a survey in their neighborhood on tobacco sales to youth, and they described how easy it was for them to buy cigarettes.]

The President. Out of the places you went, how many carded you and how many sold?

[The young people said that about 60 percent of merchants sold them tobacco. One participant said she and a friend had surveyed 50 stores.]

The President. Fifty?

Participant. Yes.

The President. Wow.

[A participant said that they were able to purchase cigarettes from 11 vending machines but found one for which the merchant would sell a token only after seeing identification. Secretary Shalala then introduced the president of the Robinson High School PTA, who discussed their efforts to have vending machines removed.]

The President. Let me say, all of you are from Virginia. Hasn't the Virginia—isn't there a new proposal before the Virginia Legislature to take much stronger positions? And I—all I know is what I've read about them, but it appeared to me that they were really moving in the right direction.

Participant. One is, as far as carding.

The President. What does it do?

Participant. You will have to have picture photo I.D. in order to purchase. That one will work. But for all intents and purposes, right now I'm afraid that the vending machine one is getting watered down.

The President. In Virginia when you get a driver's license, do they put your picture on it?

Participant. Yes, sir.

[The participants added that they doubted that the Virginia law would do away with vending machines.]

The President. Well, one of the proposals that we are considering, that's being considered here by the FDA, is the question of whether there should be no vending machines in any place that children have access to. If you're going to have vending machines, maybe they should just be where only adults can come in.

[A participant said that advertising for tobacco seemed to be increasing, especially in African-American and Latin-American neighborhoods. He noted that there were two antitobacco initiatives before the District of Columbia City Council and asked for the President's help in getting them passed.]

The President I didn't know that. Thank you for telling that. I'll see what we can do about it.

Participant. You're a resident.

The President. Let me just say one thing about the advertising. I have said this before, but I want to reiterate. If anyone doubts the impact of the advertising on the children, you have only to look at the evidence that children are much more likely to buy the three most heavily advertised brands than adults are. Adults are more likely to shop, buy generic brands, cut their costs, you know. Kids go right to the advertised brands. I think it's something like 85 percent of all cigarettes sold to young people are the three most heavily advertised brands.

[A participant said that ads strong enough to overcome smokers' brand loyalty were too strong to be used around children, and that children did not connect the potential for physical harm with their own use of tobacco. Another participant said she thought that ads contributed to peer pressure to smoke.]

The President. That's what her letter to me says: "I'm glad you're trying to stop teens and other people from smoking. There are already enough people dying from diseases, and I don't want any more people to die from diseases. I think these are the diseases you die from, like lung cancer, throat cancer, and other diseases caused by smoking. What I'm trying to say is, please stop young people and teenagers from smoking. We are tomorrow's future." Good for you. Good luck.

[A participant described being caught smoking by a school security guard. Her mother described the parent-child Smokeless Saturdays program offered as an alternative to a 3-day suspension for children caught smoking.]

The President. Let me ask you something. Do the young people in your school who smoke believe that it's dangerous?

[A participant responded that they really didn't care.]

The President. They just don't think about it one way or the other—

Participant. No.

The President. I wanted to ask another question, if I might, because I want to—this is relevant, I think, to the PTA concerns. Do the schools in your school district, do they have programs like, for grade schoolers, which show pictures of lungs in people who have smoked

for a long time and all that? Are those programs in the schools?

[A participant described a Fairfax County community coalition meeting for children and parents at which graphic slides and videos were shown on drug abuse and driving while intoxicated.]

The President. The thing that made the biggest impression on our daughter when she was in grade school was—and Hillary and I talked to her about this—the thing that made the biggest impression on her was a class she had where they just showed them pictures of lungs in progression. And you know, she saw all these black lungs, and it made this vivid impression. And my mother had smoked all her life, practically, since she was a teenager. She started as a teenager, as most people do. And my daughter kept telling her what her lungs looked like—this 8-year-old beating up on her grandmother. And for her 8th birthday, my mother stopped smoking. That was her gift to her granddaughter for her 8th birthday.

But that's why I asked you, because I thought it made a real impression on the children in the class. That's why I asked you that.

[A participant said that with the high drop-out rate in large cities many children might miss classroom training but would still need to be reached.]

The President. That sort of thing, I think you've got to do that early.

[Several participants described school health education programs and advocated starting them at an early age and emphasizing the short-term consequences of smoking.]

The President. One of the biggest problems we have in our country—and one problem I have as President and one problem everybody who's in a position of any kind of responsibility has—is dealing with the tension every human being has between thinking about what's happening right this second and what's right to do over the long run. And in the world we live in, the wonderful thing about it is that we get some much information about so many things so fast, in ways we never did before, we have so many options we never had before. It's a very exciting time to be alive, but it's also true that people are just being constantly bombarded with all these things. And I think when you're

a young person, it's just harder to believe that every little thing you do has a consequence over the long run.

And that's a problem for—it's been a problem throughout human history. It's part of human nature. But I think it's more difficult for young people today and particularly on this issue, which is why I think these groups are so important. All of your efforts really count. And I think that maybe the young people here, maybe that's the most important thing of all. I mean, I can't—does the peer pressure seem to work? Do you think you have any influence over your classmates?

Participant. It's worth a try.

Participant. Us?

The President. Yes. Do they think you're kind of loony, or do they think you're doing something good?

[One participant said that while she had no friends who smoked, she was confident that she would be able to convince a friend to quit. Another participant said that it was not that easy.]

The President. To convince people?

[The participant said that since he discovered that most people started smoking at a young age, he began teaching elementary school-age children about the harmful effects of tobacco products.]

The President. Let me ask a question. Why did you get into this? Why do you care so much about this?

[The participant explained that his godmother died of a smoking-related illness.]

The President. What about you?

[A participant said that she got involved because she found smoking disgusting and was annoyed that smokers ignored the risk of dying.]

The President. You were great, all of you. This is very encouraging. I'll do what I can to support you. We'll keep working on it. We'll do it together.

[At this point, the discussion ended, and the President took questions from reporters.]

1996 Election

Q. Mr. President, can we have your thoughts on the Iowa caucuses today? This is an historic day, obviously, for the American people. One specific thought: Did you think a year ago you

would be unopposed for the Democratic Presidential nomination?

The President. I don't know what I thought a year ago. I don't know if I thought about it. I hope I'll win tonight. [Laughter] That's my thought on the Iowa caucuses. I hope, as I told—you know, 4 years ago, there was effectively no campaign in Iowa because Senator Harkin ran and, as he well should have, he got almost all the votes there. And today, because there appears to be effectively no race in the Democratic caucus primary, I don't know how many people will go tonight. But I hope that the trip over the weekend made an impact, and I believe it did.

I was, frankly, astonished by the size and the enthusiasm of the crowds and by the response to just a serious discussion of the issues facing the country and my determination to not let this election divide the American people and also not to let the citizens of this country off the hook by saying, "Oh, I'm cynical. It doesn't make any difference."

Look at these kids. These children here—especially this young lady who was brave enough to come—[inaudible]—they are a stunning rebuke to the idea that it does not matter what ordinary citizens do in this country. It does matter what ordinary people do. These kids wrote a letter to the President; they get to come in here and talk about it. And it shows you what people can do if they work together. And so that's what I think people in Iowa responded to.

I was exuberant about the weekend; I thought it was very good. I don't know what's going to happen in the Republican caucus. I don't have any idea. As you all know, the nature of the rules and the size of the turnout has a lot to do with that. So I really don't have a clue what's going to happen.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, are you concerned that the British are no longer going to deal with Mr. Adams of Sinn Féin?

The President. Well, let me say this, I think that all the parties are probably assessing and reassessing where they are and what is necessary to do now, but I intend to do whatever I can

on behalf of the United States to try to restore the cease-fire and try to get the peace process going again.

I can tell you this: I believe if you let the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland have a say in this, it wouldn't be close. They do not want to go back to violence. They want to go forward to peace, and they expect the people who are representing them to be disciplined and mature and to peacefully work this out. That's what they expect to be done. And I just hope and pray it can be done.

And I've been working—actually, I did some work last week before the cease-fire was broken, and I intend to do some more work this week on it. We will do everything we can to try to get the process back on track.

Q. Do you think Gerry Adams can still be trusted after what happened in the last few days?

The President. I said what I thought about what happened the last few days. We're going to look at all the evidence. We're going to see what we know and what we can do, and I'm going to do what I think is best to try to promote peace there. That's what I'm going to do. And that's all I can do.

Thank you.

1996 Election

Q. Are you curious about what Republican candidate is going to emerge?

The President. [Laughter] Well, I expect I'll know something by what happens in Iowa tonight, at least if the results are clear before bedtime. I'm just like you; I honestly don't know what's going to happen. And I have found it's not very fruitful to spend your time speculating on things over which you have no influence. And I have no intention of participating in the Republican primary. I'll let them decide who they want to run.

Q. Do you like watching them fight it out among themselves?

The President. Well, I don't know how to answer that. [Laughter]

Thank you.

NOTE: The discussion began at 1:27 p.m. in the Oval Office.